

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC

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INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJECT: GOQ OFFERS TALKS WITH OTTAWA

1. SUMMARY: QUEBEC INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS MINISTER CLAUDE MORIN LEFT OPEN YESTERDAY POSSIBILITY OF GOQ BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH OTTAWA ON FUTURE OF CANADA. MORIN EMPHASIZED QUEBEC WANTED NEGOTIATE WITH ENGLISH CANADA THROUGH OTTAWA AND NOT WITH NINE OTHER PROVINCES PLUS GOC. MINISTER BELIEVES IT IS ENGLISH CANADA'S TURN TO MAKE PROPOSALS TO QUEBEC. THESE COMMENTS AND OTHER RECENT REMARKS INDICATE SOMETHING LESS THAN COMPLETE POLITICAL AUTONOMY MAY BE ACCEPTABLE TO PQ LEADERSHIP. MOST PROMISING TACTIC FOR OTTAWA NOW MAY BE SEIZE INITIATIVE WITH GENEROUS OFFER QUEBECOIS CANNOT AFFORD REFUSE.

2. IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE YESTERDAY, INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS MINISTER CLAUDE MORIN GAVE FIRMEST GOQ INDICATION YET THAT QUEBEC MAY BE READY TO DISCUSS POSSIBILITY OF BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS WITH OTTAWA. IN BRIEF EXCHANGE FOLLOWING UNION NATIONALE MOTION

CALLING FOR QUEBEC AND OTTAWA TO BEGIN FRESH CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS,
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MORIN SAID THAT HE WANTED TO TRY NEGOTIATING WITH OTTAWA.

3. MINISTER FIRST SPELLED OUT JUST WHAT PQ WAS NOT PREPARED TO DO. THERE WILL BE NO QUESTION OF RE-OPENING NEGOTIATIONS ON OLD BASIS, HE SAID, WHERE THE NINE OTHER PROVINCES PLUS GOC OUTNUMBERED QUEBEC 10 TO ONE AND SIMPLY PREPETUATED THE STATUS QUO. HOWEVER, HE ADDED, QUEBEC IS NOW READY TO LISTEN TO WHAT THE REST OF

CANADA HAS TO OFFER. IN PAST, QUESTION HAD BEEN WHAT DOES QUEBEC WANT, IT IS NOW UP TO ENGLISH CANADA TO MAKE UP ITS MIND AND TELL QUEBEC HOW IT SEES THE CANADA OF THE FUTURE. HE SUGGESTED OTTAWA MAKE USE OF ITS POSTAL SYSTEM TO SEND QUEBEC SOME PROPOSALS.

4. MORIN SAID NOVEMBER 15 ELECTIONS SHOOK UP REST OF COUNTRY TO POINT WHERE "EVERYONE IS GETTING INVOLVED" IN TRYING TO WORK OUT A NEW FUTURE FOR CANADA. THOUGH QUEBEC REJECTS THE FEDERAL SYSTEM IN ITS PRESENT FORM IN THIS COUNTRY, THIS DOES NOT NECESSARILY MEAN THAT FEDERALISM AS IT EXISTS ELSEWHERE IS UNWORKABLE. MORIN WARNED, HOWEVER, THAT A FRESH START WITH OTTAWA IS NO GUARANTEE OF SUCCESS BUT HE WANTS TO TRY IT AND AVOID DEAD-END PATHS.

5. UN AND LIBERAL DEPUTIES URGED REOPENING OF CONSTITUTIONAL TALKS BUT MOTIONS WERE DEFEATED. NONETHELESS, OBSERVERS CAME AWAY WITH NOTION THAT A FIRST STEP HAD BEEN TAKEN TOWARDS ESTABLISHMENT OF SOME SORT OF BASIS FOR DIALOGUE ON A TWO-WAY BASIS. IT ALSO HAS LEFT MANY WONDERING WHERE PQ STANDS ON INDEPENDENCE, SOVEREIGNTY AND ASSOCIATION.

6. COMMENT: RENE LEVESQUE'S GOVERNMENT HAS TACKLED BACK AND FORTH OVER EMPHASIS ON INDEPENDENCE-RELATED TERMS LIKE A SAILOR TACKLING AGAINST WIND BUT BASE COURSE HAS ALWAYS COME BACK TO SOMETHING CALLED SOVEREIGNTY-ASSOCIATION. MORIN HIMSELF HAS PREVIOUSLY SAID THAT TERMS LIKE "TOTAL SOVEREIGNTY" OR "COMPLETE RUPTURE" WERE NO LONGER APPLICABLE. NONETHELESS MINISTER'S MOST RECENT REMARKS COUPLED WITH HIS COMMENTS TO ME LAST MONTH (QUEBEC 0190) AND LEVESQUE'S SPEECHES AT WEEKEND PQ LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CONGRESS (MONTREAL 0867), INDICATE SOMETHING LESS THAN COMPLETE POLITICAL AUTONOMY MAY BE ACCEPTABLE OT PQ LEADERSHIP.

7. MORIN ALSO SPOKE TO NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE NEED TO NEGOTIATE POWER SHARING WITH OTTAWA ON A PRAGMATIC BASIS WHILE AWAITING RESOLUTION OF CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. DEPENDING ON INTERPRETATION, THIS COULD DIFFER LITTLE FROM THE PROFITABLE FEDERALISM OF BOURASSA'S LIBERALS OR THE DEMANDS FOR SPECIAL STATUS POSED BY QUEBEC GOVERNMENTS SINCE THE DUPLESSIS DAYS. (IN FACT, DUPLESSIS' LEGEND IS UNDERGOING A REFURBISHING THESE DAYS IN QUEBEC). IT DOES APPEAR THAT GOQ--HAVING BROUGHT PQ CONVENTION ALONG WITH IT ON TRICKY SOVEREIGNTY QUESTION--IS IN QUITE FLEXIBLE POSITION.

AS WE HAVE SAID MANY TIMES BEFORE, MOST PROMISING TACTIC FOR OTTAWA NOW IS SEIZE INITIATIVE WITH GENEROUS OFFER QUEBECOIS CAN NOT AFFORD REFUSE. I CONTINUE BELIEVE BEST SOLUTION MAY ULTIMATELY BE FOUND IN FORMULA WHICH QUEBEC CAN CALL SOVEREIGNTY BUT WHICH RETAINS CANADIAN UNITY, ALBEIT IN ATTENUATED

CONFEDERAL ARRANGEMENT. FROM MORIN'S REMARKS, IT IS CLEAR
THAT QUEBEC INTENDS TO NEGOTIATE WITH ENGLISH CANADA THROUGH
OTTAWA. AS QUEBEC'S CHEF DU PROTOCOL JACQUE VALLEE TOLD ME TODAY,
QUEBEC STILL STRONGLY ADHERES TO TWO NATION THEORY AND HAS
NO INTENTION OF USING PROVINCIAL-FEDERAL CONFERENCES
TO BARGAIN FOR ITS FUTURE.
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